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Roh Outlines Seoul's Program For Better Ties With North

By Peter Maass
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SEOUL, July 7 (Thursday)—South Korean President Roh Tae Woo, seeking to reassert his leadership over the volatile issue of reunification with North Korea, today unveiled a far-reaching diplomatic program aimed at reversing the decades-old politics of hostility between the two Koreas.

In a nationally televised address this morning, Roh outlined a six-point policy that includes calls for a panoply of human exchanges and trade between the two countries. The program also urges improved diplomatic and trade relations between Pyongyang and Seoul's key allies, the United States and Japan, parallel to better ties between Seoul and Pyongyang's main backers, China and the Soviet Union.

Roh, in his first televised speech since being inaugurated in February, said the program will serve to open "a new chapter in the development of inter-Korean relations and will lead to unification."

The new policy contrasts with a legacy of virtually unrelenting diplomatic confrontation toward North Korea. It is partly a result of intense pressure from militant students and dissidents.

Although the leftists have failed in the past month to gain mainstream support for their demands for rapid unification, their violent protests have focused attention on the government's failure over the years to make progress on ties with the North.

The violent student protests have posed a severe public relations problem for the Roh government,

which does not want any turbulence to disrupt the Seoul Summer Olympic Games, scheduled to begin Sept. 17. On June 10 riot police blocked more than 10,000 student militants from marching to the border village of Panmunjom for unauthorized talks with North Korean student leaders. The South Korean students have vowed to attempt another march on Aug. 15.

Many experts in Seoul caution, though, that North-South relations will probably remain on ice until after the Olympics. North Korea, stymied in its attempt to cohost the Games, plans to boycott the three-week sports festival. A senior South Korean Foreign Ministry official admitted during a news briefing yesterday that there has been no sign of a change in North Korea's stance on the Olympics or on relations with the South. Pyongyang last month rejected a call from Seoul for Cabinet-level talks.

After the Olympics, however, officials here hope North Korea will become more flexible. Seoul leaders say a successful Olympic Games may persuade Pyongyang that its confrontation policies have failed to prevent Seoul from gaining economic primacy and greater global prestige.

It also is hoped that Pyongyang will soon be influenced by political changes in China and the Soviet Union. "The world is entering an age of reconciliation transcending ideologies and political systems," Roh said. ".... I believe we have now come to a historic moment when we should be able to find a breakthrough toward a lasting peace and unification on the Korean peninsula."